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ABSTRACT

Focusing on studies conducted since 1960, this paper reviews the literature on the role of the counselor in the community college and at other levels of postsecondary education. The first section stresses the value of research on the role of the counselor and the compelling reasons for providing a clear definition of that role. The next section examines the process of role definition, reviewing the relationship between the efforts to define the counselor's role and the principles of role theory. The third section outlines the nature of the conflicts surrounding the issue of role definition and their possible causes, emphasizing the problems of communication, institutional setting and philosophy, personal and environmental characteristics, and the counselor's career aspirations. Then, differences in the definitions of the counselor's role as formulated by counselors, administrators, faculty, and students are examined in terms of the implications of these differing perceptions and the attempts to resolve differences between the counselors' ideal and actual roles. Finally, a summary of the review is presented, indicating that the literature is sometimes contradictory and often confused, and underscoring the importance of further research to clearly define the counselor's role. (HB)

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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE COUNSELOR'S ROLE:

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

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Introduction

In this paper the body of literature on the role of the counselor in the community college will be reviewed. The first section of the review will focus on the value of research on the role of the counselor and the compelling reasons that exist for more clearly defining that role. The processes by which the role is defined will be summarized in the second section. In the third section the review will turn to the nature of the conflicts surrounding the issue of role definition and their possible causes. Finally, in the fourth section, it will examine the significant differences that exist in the definitions that have been formulated by community college counselors themselves and by administrators, faculty, and students.

Two factors have influenced the selection of literature reviewed in this chapter: the recency and the relative dearth of research on the role of the community college counselor. Because little research in this area was conducted prior to 1960, the present review focuses on writings since that date. Because the research, ever since 1960, has been limited, the review incorporates relevant studies of the counselor's role at other levels of higher education.

The Value of Research on the Counselor's Role

The literature on the role of the community college counselor documents, first, that it has been the subject of considerable but inconclusive research, and, second, that the failure to satisfactorily define the role poses serious threats in personal, professional, and political terms. Palmer summarizes these threats as follows:

> The changes and confusions in the function of counseling are part of a phenomenon that pervades colleges and universities of any size. Students are uncertain as to what counselors offer. Is it therapy or advice? An answer or help in identifying a question? They do not know how to tailor their expectations, and from this uncertainty comes much of their dissatisfaction. Faculty and staff are similarly confused and are not certain where to refer students--or when certain, find their expectations confounded. Even where palpable differences exist, administrators are as likely to equate counseling A with counseling B, or counseling C with either one. Legislators call for more counseling to ensure more efficient allocation of expensive course work, but no one is quite sure which counselor should do it. Thus, tough-minded management consultants, the new architects of American higher education, are likely to cry, 'A plague on all your houses.'[1]

Palmer expounds on the personal implications of the varied expectancies that performer and recipient bring to the function of counseling. The result for students, he writes, "is frustration, dissatisfaction, and actual suffering. Those who are puzzled and disappointed may even lay blame on themselves for the failure, doubling their original pain."[2]

The professional challenge inherent in the issue of role definition is addressed throughout the literature. Ivey and Robin[3] see in the question an opportunity both to orient counseling in the present and to suggest directions

for the future. Forsythe[4] sees consensus on this matter as the sine qua non for the establishment of common goals within the profession. Jones writes of the widespread skepticism at all levels of education regarding the significance of counseling contributions to the educational process. "Much of the current disenchantment with counseling in our junior colleges," he concludes, "appears to be... related to the problem of determining what constitutes the proper role of counselors."[5] Shertzer and Stone[6] echo his analysis in their assertion that the current problem faced by counselors stems from contradictory and conflicting expectancies on the part of the people they serve.

Where headway has been made in defining the role of the counselor, benefits have accrued to the profession. Perrone, Weiking, and Nagel[7] report that the information gained from their study was used to promote and clarify the counselor's role and functions. Conversely, the literature suggests that the failure to make headway on this critical issue may have devastating results for the profession. Writes Warnath,

> The building pressures from institutional managers, coupled with the flight of students to other services, make it imperative that the profession move quickly and decisively to solve the dilemma, lest the students in the next college generation speak of professional counseling services in the past tense.[8]

Warnath's sense of the urgency of the need to define the counselor's role is shared by many who write about the political implications of this issue:

> If the doomsday predictions of many well known authorities come true, the next decade will be an extremely difficult one for higher education. The baby boom is over, state legislatures are taking a hard line on funding, and educational institutions will be faced with reduction-in-force activity and considerable belt tightening. One of the first staffing areas to be examined critically when determining funding priorities is the non-instructional counseling department.[9]

This analysis by Hughes is congruent with the observations of Mozee and Crosby. The former cautions counselors that ignoring the expectations of those with whom one works must, in the long run, be "self-defeating."[10] The latter points out that

> The continued need for counseling personnel has become an important issue in American education. The need has been questioned in the secondary schools and has begun to spread into the two-year colleges. It has been demonstrated that roles for counselors must be defined and communicated to teachers, administrators, students, and parents if counselors are going to be... effective in the future.[11]

Indeed, the literature abounds with indications that, unless the discrepancies in the college community's perceptions of the role of the counselor can be identified and resolved, the counselor stands in jeopardy of being judged a failure by large numbers of his colleagues and clients and of ultimately losing both his political and fiscal support.

The Process of Role Definition

The literature reveals the relationship between the efforts to define the community counselor's role and the principles of role theory. Role as behavior, its definition by others, the sanctions associated with enforcing it, and

the concept of actual-versus-ideal are all treated in the literature and their relevance to the proposed research made clear.

Biddle and Thomas propound the following as a consensus definition of role:

> Perhaps the most common definition is that role is the set of prescriptions defining what the behavior of a position member should be. But this much agreement is at best but an oasis in a desert of diverging opinion.[12] A careful review of the definitions reveals however, that there is one nearly universal common denominator, namely, that the concept pertains to the behaviors of particular persons.[13]

Goode also defines role in terms of behavior. It is, he writes, "a set of mutual (but not necessarily harmonious) expectations of behavior between two or more actors, with reference to a particular type of situation."[14]

The less harmonious aspects of role definition are addressed by Bentley and by Ivey and Robin. The former suggests that role definition must include the interactive dimension between two or more groups, each having a voice in defining the role. While counselors thus have the essential responsibility for defining their role, they must obtain feedback during the role-defining process from those they serve.[15] The latter contend that research into the counselor's role will not be clarified until the dimension of role conflict stemming from the role definers is considered:

> Research is needed to determine the specific role expectation of several role definers of counselor role. Such research should specify the amount and degree of role agreement or disagreement within and between the various groups who define the role.... There is need to study the degree of convergence between groups of role definers and the counselors' definition of their role.[16]

Blocker[17] explores how an individual's and, by extension, a profession's competency is judged according to how well he or it meets the normative role expectations prescribed by the group. In the same vein, Katz and Kahn[18] point out how role expectations are not limited by or restricted to a job description; but are maintained through what others expect. In defense of the individual, Herrick[19] maintains that outside influences do not limit or deny the personality differences of the individual in carrying out a role; but he nevertheless admits the primacy of social determiners in defining a role.

That sanctions are involved in the definition of roles and in the enforcement of role expectations is treated by Biddle and Thomas and by Ivey and Robin. Roles are shaped, according to Biddle and Thomas, by the expectations of persons trying to control the situation, "by the demands and rules of others, by their sanction."[20] Ivey and Robin underline this aspect of role theory when they assert that "the importance of the role definers in terms of their influence upon the counselor and the role definers' ability to impose sanctions for deviation from specific prescribed role behavior should be noted."[21]

A final aspect of role definition treated in the literature, and applied only recently to counseling research, conceptualizes human behavior into categories of what is ideally expected and what is actually performed. Bentley[22] examines the role of the counselor in the light of this

concept. He postulates that it is possible to differentiate between a counselor's normative role, those standards or norms of behavior expected of him, and a counselor's actual role, what he actually does. The proposed research relies heavily on this view of role definition.

The Conflicts Over Role Definition

The definition of the community college counselor's role has preoccupied the profession for many years. In spite of the impetus toward redefinition, the role continues to be a topic of considerable debate and disagreement, and the literature abundantly reflects this fact. Writings on both the nature of the conflict surrounding the issue of role definition and on the possible causes of the conflict are numerous.

The problem in its most obvious form is summarized by Schneider and by Mozee. "It would appear...," writes Schneider, "that the administrator, the client, the community, the counselor, and the counselor education personnel all have views which are different to some degree in regard to the tasks of counselors."[23] Mozee concurs: "The observed incongruencies between various role definer groups and counselors is symptomatic of counselor role conflict."[24]

The issues on which the role definers disagree fall into two broad categories: the functions of the college counselor and his proper orientation vis-a-vis the institution and the client. Pepinsky and Meara summarize the debate in regard to functions as follows:

> Warman found that counselors identified personal adjustment problems as the most appropriate type for clients to present in counseling. Other campus groups--students, faculty members, and other student personnel workers--had different ideas. Ten years later, counselor priorities were unchanged and still different from those of others in the university community.[25]

Resnick and Gelso[26] corroborate this finding. They report that, although all groups sampled in their study viewed "adjustment to self and others" problems as more acceptable for counselors to treat than did groups surveyed a decade earlier, the fact remained that counselors still rated these problems as more appropriate than did any of the other groups. Jones elaborates on this issue by identifying the key role-definition questions as follows:

> (1) Should counselors engage in activities which might be considered psychotherapy?
> (2) Should counselors spend a substantial portion of their time performing the academic function?[27]

The second question he raises, like the first, is addressed repeatedly in the literature, by Shertzer and Stone[28] among many others.

The leading exponent of the view that the major aspect of counselors' role conflict is the competing requirements placed on them by institution and client is Warnath. He writes:

> If they [counselors] allow their activities to be defined by institutional managers, they will lose contact with the great majority of youth. If they move to meet the highest priority needs of their student constituencies, ... they run the risk of direct confrontation with administrators for abandoning their traditional role.[29]

The "most difficulty attitude change" counselors may be called upon to make if they are to survive, Warnath, concludes,

> ...will probably be shifting the primary focus from students to the institution. It will be necessary to see the welfare of students interwoven with the optimum functioning of the institution rather than to continue the current assumption that they must be primarily concerned with direct services to students in whatever form.[30]

In exploring the factors that contribute to the conflict over the counselor's role, the literature offers a host of hypotheses and findings. Rippee, Hanvey, and Parker voice one of the most frequently heard, that the conflict originates in counselors' failure to understand and mutually agree on their role:

> How do teachers and administrators learn counselor role? Their perceptions of the counselor role, to a large extent, are based on the counselor's perceptions of his role and the degree to which he both implements this role and communicates it to others. The counselor, it seems, needs to understand himself and his purposes and then implement them if he expects others to seek appropriate services from him.[31]

Crosby,[32] too, found wide disparity in the way community college counselors perceive their own role and significant disagreement in their view of ideal and actual role performance. An excellent summary and explanation of this phenomenon are given by Bentley:

> Essentially, three factors have resulted in the counselor's failing to define his role adequately to other counselors, to the general public, and to the clients themselves. The first reason is that he cannot agree...upon those duties that he ought to perform and the way in which they should be performed. The second reason is that he is not powerful enough because of the low status and disorganization to impose his definition upon others. The third reason is that he does not know how to go about devising and constructing a positive strategy.[33]

Bentley is not alone in his assertion that the failure or inability of counselors to communicate their role is central to the causes of their conflict. His view is shared by DeVolder, Palmer, Winderman, Shertzer and Stone, Mozee, and Crosby,[34] the last of whom states unequivocally that "problems [of role conflict] exist because counselors have not been militant in informing the public about the proper counseling role."[35]

Other literature concerning the causes of conflict over the counselor's role identifies the nature of counselor training, confusion with the role of the high school counselor, the impact of the institution's setting and philosophy, divergent personal and environmental characteristics, and counselors' own career aspirations as contributing factors. Counselor education which stresses theory, ideas, personal philosophy and self-understanding at the expense of professional identity and role definition receives serious criticism in the literature. Warnath holds it accountable in another, related regard:

> Trained within the context of the private practitioner model, the college counselor has ordinarily been little concerned about questions related to the operation of the bureaucratic structure within which he works--or his role in that structure as perceived by others.[36]

Elterich, Gable, and Kerr suggest that confusion between the high school counselor's role and that of the community college counselor's role contributes to the role definition problem:

> Many of the perceptions held by community college students and some faculty concerning counselors are undoubtedly traceable to those functions performed by high school counselors. These are not roles and functions that most community college counselors perceive as important.... Students place more importance on those counseling functions that they are familiar with (e.g., educational planning) while counselors consider those functions that are related to their training as most important (e.g., personal counseling).[37]

The impact of the disparate institutional settings and philosophies on the problem of role definition is treated by Wasson and Strowig, Bentley, and Gillies.[38] The four concur on the impossibility of understanding the counselor's role separate from the context in which it is carried on and the impossibility, therefore, of ever arriving at a single consensus definition. Crosby[39] identifies the relationship that certain personal and environmental characteristics have to counselors' and administrators' incongruent perceptions of the counselor's role. His findings support earlier research conducted by Bentley, Blocker, Dustin and Dugan, and Katz and Kahn.[40] Finally, the literature suggests that counselor's own career aspirations may contribute to the lack of clarity that characterizes the definitions of their role. Fordyce[41] observes that many administrators have come through the ranks of counseling, using it as a stepping stone to higher administrative posts and giving little thought or energy to professional concerns when they are in it. Without protecting the interests of any of the parties to the conflict surrounding the counselor's role, the literature, then, presents, a broad range of interpretations of that conflict's nature and causes.

Significant Differences in the Role Definitions

The literature examines the many definitions of the counseling function that have been postulated by counselors themselves and by administrators, faculty, and students. Occasionally in agreement, more often in contradiction, these views and the differences among them have been the subject of numerous studies.

The counseling role as it is defined by practitioners receives central attention in the literature because of its potential, however unrealized, to shape the definitions of other members of the college community. That there is division in the ways that counselors define their own role is abundantly clear. O'Banion, Thurston, and Gulden, as well as Trent, examine the philosophical issues that divide counselors in their attempts to reach consensus on role definition. The former set forth the emerging role of the counselor as facilitator of human development, as distinct from the traditional role of the counselor as deliverer of services.[42] Trent traces the professional debate between the espousers of the "social ethic," those who would measure the stature of an educational institution by the number of students it prepares well for their roles in life, and the espousers of the "humanistic ethic," those who hold that colleges should facilitate

> ...an atmosphere in which students can increase not only their skill competencies, awareness and acceptance of others, and their intellectual understanding, but will also grow in flexibility and creativity, awareness and acceptance of self, courage to explore and experiment, openness to experience and gain a useful value system and a satisfying life style.[43]

How these philosophical differences, and others, are translated into conflicts about the appropriateness of various counselor functions is the subject of considerable research. Forsythe[44] found that there was wide diversity within counselor groups in Tennessee's community colleges about their activities. His findings are corroborated by Herrick[45] in his study of New York State's community college counselors and by Crosby[46] in his study of North Carolina's community college counselors. Bentley, too, observes how the counselor "cannot agree...upon those duties that he ought to perform and the way in which they should be performed."[47] In opposition to this view, however, are the findings of Lindstrom, whose study "revealed that counselors are in general agreement as to the ideal role of the two-year college counselor.... Significant differences in role perception were in amount of positive agreement rather than a representation of opposing views."[48]

Beyond the differences that counselors have with each other concerning their role are the conflicts they perceive between the actual counseling role and the one they define as ideal. Herrick[49] found the discrepancy between role performance and role conception to be highly significant. He also found that counselors were not performing the functions to which they held personal commitment. This gap between actual and ideal is further documented by Welter in his study of counselors in Virginia's community college system. He found "significant differences, indicating potential counselor role conflict,...between counselors' preferred [ideal] rank

ordering and their rank order based upon [actual] Virginia Community College System experiences for six of the eleven counselor functions" he examined.[50] In a related study of counselors at a Northern California community college, Neasham[51] documents the discrepancy between counselors' ideal role, their "professional role," and counselors' actual role, their "perceived opportunity to be of service to students." She found that counselors who hold high professional conceptions of role and low bureaucratic conceptions express the greatest conflict.

In their attempts to resolve the differences between themselves and between the actual and ideal role, counselors have been markedly fragmented and unsuccessful. Following his study of the differences in counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the counselor's role, however, Herrick cautions them not to place theburden for the resolution of this issue on the shoulders of administrators. He, among other investigators, found "significant differences" between the two groups: "Of the six areas of counselor function examined, administrators perceived 'Establishing staff relationships' as the most important. Counselors rated 'Service to individual students' as their most important function."[52] Herrick's findings are substantiated and elucidated by Peters and Shertzer and by Warnath. The former assert that the conflict between counselor and administrator over the counselor's role stems in part from the fact that "administration has failed to see the nature of the guidance function and has seen counselors

as trouble shooters and substitute teachers."[53] Warnath's interpretation of the conflict is more far-reaching:

> The counselor's role is what it is because institutional forces permit or determine that role using criteria consistent with the goals, purposes, and image of the institution.... Those services that administrators expect professional counselors to perform as part of their organizational role are actually counterproductive to the establishment of trusting and meaningful relationships between counselors and students.[54]

These views are tempered by others which see areas of agreement as well as divergence between counselors and administrators on the question of role definition. Crosby[55] found that while some differences in the perceptions of the counselor's role existed, there was general agreement between the two groups on the counselor's actual and ideal role. Both groups also agreed that greater emphasis should be placed on the ideal rather than the actual tasks. Stensaas concludes his study of the matter as follows:

> It would appear that counselors are not working in isolation from the...administration. Even though significant differences on specific ideal tasks and professional problems were found between the different professional groups, their general responses showed a positive relationship.[56]

A third group of investigators found no significant differences between administrator and counselor on the definition of the latter's role. Lykins[57] reports "substantial consensus" between the two groups on the appropriateness of selected counselor functions. Welter[58] reports "no significant differences of opinion" among community college presidents, deans of student services, and counselors. Mozee writes of counselors' seeming unawareness that "their role conception is

highly and positively correlated with the role expectations held for them by chief student personnel administrators."[59] Where such high correlation exists between the two groups, the question raised by Ivey and Robin, Crosby, and others[60] may be appropriate: Does the administrator function as the role sender, playing a crucial part in the way the counselor interprets his role?

The range of agreement and disagreement that characterizes counselors' and administrators' definitions of the counselor's role also characterizes counselors' and faculty members' role definitions as well. Welter[61] again found "no significant differences of opinion" with respect to the two groups' preferred priorities for nine of the eleven counseling functions he examined. Elterick, Gable, and Kerr[62] discovered interesting divergence in Connecticut community colleges. They found faculty generally supportive of counseling services, while students and counselors themselves were generally critical. Stensaas'[63] mixed findings about counselors and administrators apply also to counselors and faculty. While there are significant differences on specific ideal tasks, the general responses of the three groups he surveyed showed high correlation.

The lowest level of congruence was reported by Hinke, Dougan, and Mozee. The first found that counseling directors at 52 percent of the institutions he surveyed "did not adequately understand the counselor's role nor the duties which he performs."[64] Dougan[65] identified twelve critical incident

categories of counseling functions and found great disparity in the way that faculty and counselors weighted them. The functions which faculty ranked first (works to establish and maintain good communications with peers and staff) and third (does not make errors in academic advisement) were ranked ninth and twelfth respectively by counselors. Like Dougan, Mozee found "highly significant differences between the role conceptions held by counselors...and the role expectations held for them by their faculties," and he cautions counseling staffs to "incorporate this knowledge into programs whereby these expectations are either met, modified and met, or changed."[66]

The differences between counselors' own definition of their role and the definitions formulated for them by administrators and faculty pale beside the conflicts that exist between counselors' and students' perceptions of the counseling role. Though Lykins[67] reports "substantial consensus" between students and counselors in North Carolina's Community College System, he is virtually alone in this finding. The literature abundantly documents the discrepancies between the two groups' reports of actual role and the disparity students see between actual and ideal role. Neither of these issues, however, receives as much attention as students' and counselors' almost diametrically opposed definitions of the ideal counseling role.

Tallon observes axiomatically that "if a student is going to be satisfied with the counseling service, then the student's perception of the counselor's role and function

should correspond with the counselor's actual role."[68] Yet Hedlund[69] and others report large discrepancies between the functions that counselors say are performed and the functions students say are performed.

Benedict[70] suggests that the disparity between students' ideal conception of a counseling center and their image of their own center may account for many students' lack of interest in using the service. Warnath[71] posits that the spontaneous emergence of such specialized services as drug crash pads, abortion referral services, and minority programs independent of the institution's formal counseling services may be symptomatic of this disparity. Forysthe's study of students and counselors in Tennessee's community colleges corroborates the observations of Benedict and Warnath:

> Differences in student perceptions of desired counselor activities and counselor perceptions of actual counselor activities...were noted for each college and the total study. The study did not reveal any significant difference between student and counselor perceptions of actual counselor activities....
>
> The study indicated that community college counselors are not meeting the desires of students with their current activities. Students would like to receive more services than the counselors are currently performing.[72]

Students' skepticism about whether their own counseling centers are capable of meeting their ideal and providing the services they would like to receive may in part account for their sharp differences with counselors over the ideal counseling role.[73] Despite the studies of Benedict, Warnath, and Forsythe cited above, there is a great burden of evidence in the literature that students do not share counselors' view

of the appropriateness of discussing personal problems in counseling. Winderman,[74] who found significant differences between all the students and all the counselors he studied, reports that the greatest differences between the two groups focused on this issue. Cohen,[75] too, observed that students ranked "Adjustment to Self and Others" problems as the least appropriate for discussion at the counseling center, while counselors ranked them as most appropriate. Wilcove's and Sharp's[76] study at the University of Wyoming yielded the same findings, though they discovered that students who had used the services of counselors saw adjustment problems as more appropriate than those who had not.

In his study of Iowa Community College DeVolder concluded that:

> "Counselors and students did not show a high degree of agreement regarding perception of importance of counselor functions....A difference...was found to exist in twenty-six of thirty-six items identified as important counselor functions."

Students identified educational and occupational items as having importance more often than counselors did, and counselors in turn identified more items dealing with personal counseling. Functions such as registering, scheduling new students, and checking credits for graduation were identified as important counseling functions by students, but counselors did not see them as counseling functions at all.

In examining the findings of differences between students' and counselors' definitions of the counseling role,

Mozee concludes that "counselors accurately perceive the role expectations held for them by students by do not hold most of these expectations within their own role conception."[78] Pepinsky and Meara, however, cite a study by Harman which goes a long way to explain and resolve the differences:

> Harman developed a questionnaire in which former clients were asked to evaluate the services they received .... In response the former clients diagnosed their problems as follows: vocational (58 percent), personal (29 percent) and educational (13 percent). But when asked the cause of these problems, 44 percent of the clients identified lack of information about self and 34 percent indicated conflict within self. It seems plausible to assume that many counselors would interpret the latter kinds of troubles as personal problems. Clients and counselors, at least, may not differ markedly in their ideas of problems to be solved through counseling.[79]

Summary

This review of the literature on the role of the counselor in the community college has examined, first, the reasons why research into the subject is of value. It has explored the personal, professional, and political implications that are inherent in the issue of role definition, and it has touched upon the dangers that may confront the profession if it fails to satisfactorily resolve the issue.

The review has next summarized the processes through which role is defined, including its basis in behavior, the function of others in shaping it, the sanctions associated with enforcing it, and the concept of actual-versus-ideal role. It has examined the studies which relate these aspects of role theory to the proposed research.

In turning to the conflicts over the definition of the counselor's role, the review has explored both the substantive nature of the conflict and the underlying factors that contribute to it. In the final section it has addressed the specific, significant differences that characterize counselors' own definition of their role and the often opposing definitions of the administrators, faculty, and students whom they serve.

The literature, like the matter of role definition itself, is sometimes contradictory and often inconclusive. Several of the researchers discuss the difficulty of generalizing from their studies and recommend that they be replicated in new settings.[80] Others, like Ivey and Robin, point out the need for continued research to determine "the specific role expectations of several role definers of counselor role."[81] Still others, including Warnath,[82] call for the modification of the counselor's professional role to be undertaken as a national issue. To the extent that additional research brings clarity to the matter, it will make a significant contribution to the profession and its diverse clients.

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